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ABSTRACT

The internationally accepted definition of gifted children includes a range of factors that contribute to giftedness, but makes no mention of the child's motivation, capacity for self-initiation, or ability to work independently. Using the current definition, schools and teachers remain bound to gifted identification based on academic achievement and high IQ ratings. Creative ability should always be one of the bases for identifying gifted children. Ellerton Primary School in South Africa has used the Renzulli Scale for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students as an identification model. It obtains teacher ratings of the pupil's characteristics in the areas of learning, motivation, creativity, and leadership. Renzulli has determined that three clusters (above average ability, task commitment, and creativity) must be present and interact to produce creative achievement. Ellerton modifies the curriculum to accommodate the gifted or highly creative child in the mainstream as well as in a specifically designed system of revolving out and into small group situations. The specific methods used in the school for enrichment and acceleration are presented, the theoretical and practical bases for the encouragement of creativity are described, and the characteristics of the gifted child are identified. (VW)

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IDENTIFYING AND NURTURING GIFTEDNESS IN THE CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF ELLERTON PRIMARY SCHOOL.

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CREATIVITY AND LEARNING WITHIN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM.

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Although every mother owns one , the first formal recognition of the gifted child came from the United States and was compiled in 1972. Since then , this definition has been accepted internationally. It is also the definition we have been following in South Africa.

This definition prepared for the United States Congress of 1972 reads as follows :
"Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons and who by virtue of outstanding abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programmes and services beyond those normally provided by the regular school programme in order to realise their contribution to self and society.
Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and / or potential ability in any of the following areas :-
1. general intellectual ability
2. specific academic aptitude.
3. creative or productive thinking
4. leadership ability
5. visual and performing arts
6. psychomotor ability."

Since 1972 the final quality , that of psychomotor ability has been withdrawn for reasons that it presents too wide an area.

This definition has served a good purpose by including a range of factors which contribute to giftedness , but it has one glaring shortcoming. It makes no mention or provision for the affective mode or the attitudes of the child. There is no mention of the child's motivation , there is no account made for his capacity for self-initiation,

the ability to work independently. This ability to work according to his own timing, or his own initiative is one of the hallmarks of the truly gifted.

Another problem is that this definition tends to be misinterpreted and misused in many schools. The teachers talk about and theorize on the characteristics of giftedness but remain bound to the simple but incomplete means of identification , namely those of academic achievement and high IQ rating.

An example of this is the fact that we have well-defined and well-standardised intelligence tests , but one is hardpressed to find a creativity test. How is the creativity of a child assessed? There are many batteries of these tests available. To name but two we have the Torrance Tests as well as the Minnesota Creativity Tests. These are both available but are seldom used as a creativity test is a lengthy , drawn out process and our school clinics are understaffed , cases with a need for immediate therapeutic intervention are wait-listed. Time is not available , it is unreasonable to request the psychologists attached to our school clinics to conduct creativity tests.

It is the great merit of creativity , that Torrance himself, who has this to say :- "Creativity is a distinguishing characteristic of human excellence in every area of behaviour. Creativity has long been recognised as essential in medical and scientific advances , invention , excellence in the arts and the like. Creativity is an essential element in all genuine breakthroughs in science , literature and the arts. I have never contended that creative ability be made the sole basis for identifying gifted children nor that creativity be the sole criterion for outstanding achievement. However , I WOULD ARGUE STRONGLY THAT CREATIVE ABILITY ALWAYS BE ONE OF THE BASES FOR IDENTIFYING GIFTED CHILDREN."

In how many schools are creativity tests applied? In how many schools is the creative factor even considered? Unless creativity is considered and assessed the identification procedures are not valid.

The identification model we use very successfully at Clarendon is the Renzulli Scale for Rating the Behavioural Characteristics of Superior Students. This scale is designed to obtain teacher ratings of the pupil's characteristics in the areas of Learning , Motivation , Creativity ,

These factors in the readily observable behaviour of children , the factors of intelligence , creativity and leadership give a well-rounded picture of children working from these criteria we can see the potential producers , and not the highly conformist consumers who do well in tests and exams.

To validate this further , Getzels says that "....there is little relationship between school grades in the one hand and creative accomplishments on the other."

Torrance found and says , "....getting good grades in college has little connection with more remote and more socially relevant kinds of achievement ; indeed , in some colleges , the higher the student's grades , the less likely it is that he is a person with creative potential. So it seems desirable to extend our criteria of talented performance."

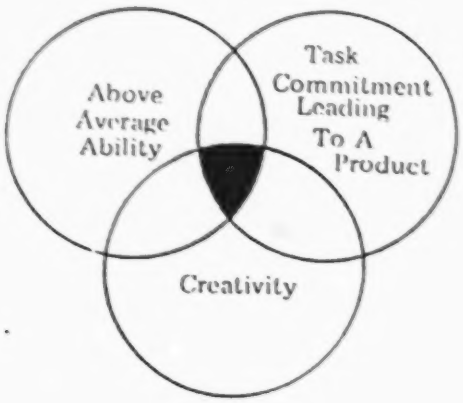
We dare not ignore these research findings. We need to rethink our criteria. It is not necessarily Monica at the top of the class who is the gifted pupil , it might well be that Ben , always in conflict with the teacher is an under-achieving gifted or highly creative child.

Research shows that no single criterion should ever be used to identify giftedness. At Ellerton we consider the "WHOLE CHILD" and recognise the cognitive as well as the affective areas. People who have achieved recognition because of their accomplishments have possessed a fairly well defined set of interlocking clusters. These have been identified by Renzulli and comprise :

ABOVE AVERAGE ABILITY

TASK COMMITMENT

CREATIVITY



No single one of those clusters makes for giftedness. It is rather the interaction of the three clusters that research has shown to be the necessary ingredient for creative achievement, for giftedness.

In South Africa our programmes for the gifted child are a few years old now and if we achieve nothing more with these programmes , we could feel some satisfaction from progress if we begin to question the magic aura of the IQ test.

AN EXAMINATION OF HOW WE MODIFY THE CURRICULUM AT ELLERTON PRIMARY SCHOOL TO ACCOMMODATE THE GIFTED OR HIGHLY CREATIVE CHILD IN THE MAINSTREAM AS WELL AS IN A SPECIALLY DESIGNED SYSTEM OF REVOLVING OUT AND INTO SMALL GROUP SITUATIONS.

1. CONTENT OF SYLLABUS
2. SPECIAL SKILLS AND MODIFIED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. CONTENT OF SYLLABUS

The gifted child is able to master the fundamentals of the syllabus in a far shorter time than the average child. We must allow him to do this and once the basic syllabus-related matter has been covered , we have two options open. The first is to encourage him towards enrichment around the syllabus , known as horizontal enrichment. This is satisfactory but time-consuming for the teacher who has to devise strategies for this individualised study. She then has to monitor and provide the necessary materials for this individual study. Individualised learning is the optimum but there is a more effective method and this is acceleration across the subject. As maths and science are both hierarchical in their content , it is more satisfying for the pupil , less time-consuming for the teacher if the pupil is allowed to work to his true ability ; even if this means that in the Std Three classroom , he is doing Std Five maths. This has to be done in an organised and structured way so that the following year's teacher is able to continue from where he left off and not expect him to revert to the mainstream maths again. This acceleration is carefully structured so as to provide a continuum for the accelerated child.

2. SPECIAL SKILLS AND MODIFIED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

For the areas of special skills and modified learning environment I would like us first to examine some of the needs of the gifted child. I refer to Torrance who in 1962

promulgated the needs of the gifted child.

1. He prefers to work alone. Research has shown that the gifted child is better able to work at his own pace if he is able to work on his own and independently. This might be in the corridor , the media centre of under a tree in the playground. He is a motivated child , he has high task commitment and we must allow him to develop this quality away from supervision.

2. The gifted child needs the challenge and stimulation of difficult tasks. The under-challenged gifted child will prefer to see how many direct hits he can score with a makeshift peashooter. His gifts have become subverted. This crime of holding back is most prevalent in the Junior Primary section of the school. A Sub A child who has mastered the concept of 10 should be allowed to proceed and not get stuck on 9 merely because the syllabus (or Piaget) says he is not yet "ready" to move up the ladder. The teacher thinks he is not "ready" ; the child experiences frustration.

3. The gifted child needs to feel some purpose. We must provide a real-world situation in which his efforts may be recognised. This may be done by some meaningful feedback in the school situation , as for instance reporting back on his latest experiment or having his products prominently displayed within the school.
The most effective means of recognition would be in the form of publication to meet a real audience.

4. The gifted child has a need for activity. He can not stop working. If he is engrossed in a problem he should be given the freedom to complete the task. He should not be subjected to having to stop abruptly because the bell has gone at the end of a period. We need to give him the stretches of time to work at the high level of thinking of which he is capable.

5. Gifted children are sometimes non-conforming. We need to recognise this high level of individuality , we need to guide

them through this search for their own uniqueness. It was Barron who maintained that , ".....gifted individuals reject the demands of their society to surrender their individuality because they want to own themselves totally." This forms their potential gift to society as it is this element of creativity which will work to the benefit of the rest of us. It was Carl Rogers who said , ".....unless man can make new and original adaptation to his environment as rapidly as his science can change the environment , our culture will perish. Not only individual maladjustment and group tensions , but international annihilation will be the price we pay for the lack of creativity."

THE CREATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT ELLERTON PRIMARY SCHOOL.

The creative learning environment is one based on differentiation. It is an environment in which the child is central to all attention and is allowed to feel free to make mistakes. When we programme activities provision is always made for open-ended responses. When the situation is formal , the accent is on accuracy and concentrated attention. In this polarised learning environment the full range of the child's affective qualities are provided for.

SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT ENABLE US TO PROMOTE CREATIVITY ARE :

1. We encourage the child to be productive by basing our teaching strategies on the child's activity rather than on passivity. Thus the means are the end as we strengthen those skills which form the basis of primary education. The 3 R's have been redefined by us into the Four R's. These are : Reading , Writing , Arithmetic and Research skills.

Much use is made of the well equipped and expertly run Media Centre. From Sub B the children are trained in the uses of catalogues and the Dewey System of information retrieval. We have accepted the premise that access to information is a prerequisite for the development of giftedness.

2. By chunking the time table the child is able to pursue the activities in modules of time rather than in abbreviated periods. The gifted child is capable of long attention spans expressive of his task commitment. This extended attention span is provided for by the teacher's flexible attitude to timetabling.

3. In planning her work the teacher provides the necessary INITIAL STIMULUS. This takes the form of an Interest Centre around a topic ; a direct experience as on a visit ; or a direct encounter with a specialist. Failing either of these we make use of strong visual-auditory stimuli of film , videos or slides.

At times it is the child's own experience which acts as the initial stimulus that leads to the second stage of activities based on Renzulli's Type Two Activities of : observation , interpretation , analysis , evaluation , comparison , elaboration , appreciation , brainstorming , discussion and synthesis.

4. Evaluation is an ongoing process and with pupil : teacher interaction evaluation forms part of the skill-strengthening , learning , extending processes.

5. On completion of the study or problem-solving exercise there is firm and public recognition. This takes the form of a reportback to other , older groups of children and parents as in a talk , a demonstration or a Special Assembly.

When it is warranted , we provide adult platforms such as reporting back to a group of adults or publication in a journal or in the local press.

6. The parents are informed of the special nature of the programme. They are guided to becoming supportive and fears of "missing work" are allayed. We help them to become more sensitive to the special needs of these children. We help them re-evaluate their expectations of these children.

7. Our attitude is one of covert attention as this obviates any elitism. From our research we have found that the strongest factor in our primary school situation is that of peer-group acceptance. Any exclusion by this formidable peer-group results in the child's trauma and eventual personal request to be withdrawn from the programme. To facilitate this covert approach we encourage the gifted child to revolve in and out of mainstream work at her own initiative. She has a range of alternatives to being bored in a classroom surrounded by children who are still occupied with the task she has completed. She revolves out

1. To continue her private programme of study.
2. To visit the Media Centre.
3. To continue her work in the small-group intensive pupil: teacher interaction that takes place in the enrichment room.

For this self-initiated study the teacher needs to have a very positive self image. He needs to be a fully functioning, self actualizing person who is sensitive and resourceful and one who feels comfortable off the beaten track. He must be able to relate to pupils who at times will be irritating , obnoxious.
He must function as an awakener , then a guide and a listener, at times a refuge and eventually as a patron.

The emphasis has shifted. From an imparter of knowledge to a facilitator with clever stage management abilities to direct attentions and manipulate questions.

So much of the joy and energy of childhood are wasted in acquiring and memorising standardised information. Learning for the gifted is not the simple acquisition of facts. It is the process of collecting facts , of relating facts and then transforming these facts into new ideas , new insights , new awarenesses. This is the essence of Bloom's higher-level thinking processes. Rather than having to memorise the chronology of the development of the silicon chip the gifted child has the facts available and then analyses the implications of the invention.

When correctly nurtured , the gifted child is a hungry processor of knowledge , of stimuli or information. He needs a never-ending supply , a steady stream of input. At school this must come from the teacher , the source. She needs to be constantly aware of this hunger. The teacher must provide this input , or the access to this input. The teacher herself will become a searcher for the meaningful , the relevant , the stimulating. If she is not capable of these attitudes , better she leave gifted education severely alone. There are great needs in all areas of education.

ENDS

Ellen Smith - 30 May 1984

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